

# Working with New Immigrant Employees – Part 1 – Attracting and Fair Screening



## **How prepared is your organization to screen and hire new immigrant employees?**

2016 may bring to Canada more immigrants than at any time previously. The newly elected Canadian government has committed to bringing an increased number of refugees over the next few months, 25,000 or more, many of whom will be working age adults and some of whom will seek employment opportunities in 2016.

The previous Canadian government had also targeted bringing over 100,000 economic immigrants into Canada in 2015 through Canada's new Express Entry program. Although the actual number of economic immigrants approved in 2015, as of December 16<sup>th</sup>, was under 30,000 (only 29,515) those numbers may rise drastically in 2016. With 100,000 of thousands new and very recent immigrants arriving in Canada in one way or another the odds are great that your organization will be screening and hiring relatively new immigrants in the next year.

Apart from the perceived fairness of hiring new immigrants, evidence has been demonstrated repeatedly that having a diverse workplace with individuals from many backgrounds has a positive impact on the business bottom line. Many of the countries largest employers compete to ensure they are hiring from a diverse pool of candidates. Diversity often equals innovation and agility. For these, and other reasons, attracting and fairly screening new immigrant candidates can make a lot of sense.

## **Screening and Interviewing Your Immigrant Candidates**

The key steps in attracting, screening and hiring immigrant employees is to create an immigrant friendly, inclusive and accessible job posting and hiring process.

**Step 1 – Attracting qualified immigrant candidates** – Is your job posting or company brand inviting to a diverse pool of candidates?

One element of a fair job posting is to remember that Canadian experience is not required to make one a successful employee. Therefore, nowhere in your job descriptions should you indicate that Canadian experience or education is required. In fact, in Ontario you cannot specify that Canadian experience is a requirement or screen out a candidate who does not have Canadian experience (read more at the Ontario Human Rights Commission Website). You may need to indicate that Canadian

registration in a regulated profession is required but in many cases you may be able to hire an immigrant through a bridging program or into a junior position.

When referencing qualifications consider saying 'or equivalent' as opposed to saying a specific Canadian degree such as a BBA.

Also keep in mind that qualified candidates can come from all backgrounds, therefore it is useful to post your jobs where immigrants may see the postings including in the Job bank, and by sharing job postings with the local immigrant employment networks.

In the job description include a point that says you welcome applications from people of all backgrounds, including individuals with disabilities and individuals of diversity including new immigrants.

## **Step 2 – Craft a Welcoming Image**

You can also increase your chances of hiring a diverse workforce if your company image, your brand, speaks to a diverse community. The material you use for recruiting and your website contains images and words that depict your inclusivity. On your website careers page ask yourself how much diversity is displayed.

Additionally, it is okay to ask the candidate to pronounce their name and help them to pronounce yours.

## **Step 3 – Open Your Doors**

New immigrants are often at a significant disadvantage a disadvantage not only because they do not have Canadian experience but also because they may not know how to function within the hiring process in Canada. Make it easier for these candidates by sharing information about your hiring process on your website and in your postings. For example, it is not uncommon for new immigrants to errors that could get them screened out such as including information such as date of birth, religion and marital status).

Be careful not to prejudge a candidate because the resume or application does not conform to the local norms. Focus on qualifications over style of resume. This also applies to covering letters and interview etiquette. To help immigrant candidates have a more fair opportunity to be considered for an interview provide very clear directions on the appropriate application process including asking that a candidate not include information that would make you unable to consider the application.

The Immigrant candidate may also not understand appropriate cultural norms and expectations during the interview itself, including having a different personal space zone or never elevating his/her own contributions in an interview. Although it is certainly okay to choose a candidate who can talk about his or her skills and contributions if you do have a recent immigrant in the interview consider approaching the interview as you would with a new grad by including more probing questions and asking more follow-ups to elicit additional information.

Providing a fair hiring process for a refugee or new immigrant does not mean being unfair to a candidate with a background of living in Canada for a longer time. A fair process should provide each candidate with the opportunity to be considered and then shine based on abilities and potential to make a contribution to your organization.